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Every December, my husband and I try to go to Disney World for a few days to attend the Candlelight Processional at the America Gardens Theater in Epcot. Tom likes Disney World because he says it’s the only place where he doesn’t think about having cancer. But that’s not why we go at Christmastime.

We love to sit in the large amphitheater under the stars and listen to the enormous choir as it sings traditional Christmas carols, accompanied by a 50-piece orchestra and someone who reads about Christ’s birth from the Scriptures.

Last year as I sat there, I was so overcome with joy and gratitude to God that I felt I had experienced a tiny taste of heaven—until something went wrong.

The processional was almost over. The narrator said, “Let us rejoice in the universal message of peace on Earth and good will to men.”

Really? Then the choir sang, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let Earth receive her King,” and the narrator read Isaiah 9:6: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

As the orchestra played the opening strains of the “Hallelujah Chorus” of Handel’s Messiah, we all rose to our feet; and the choir proclaimed, “King of kings and Lord of lords. . . . He shall reign forever and ever.”

A little frustrated, I turned to my husband. “We just sang about Jesus being King and Lord and how He will reign forever. And that guy just told everyone the message of Christmas is about ‘peace on Earth and good will to men.’ The message is about Jesus!”

Disney, of course, toes the politically correct line. I’m glad we don’t have to do that in Israel My Glory. We can tell you unabashedly Christmas is about God sending us the Savior. Someday, that Savior will rule over the entire earth from Jerusalem, and it will be politically incorrect to deny His existence, deity, royalty, or authority.

In this issue, we highlight the five women God has embedded in the otherwise male lineage of the Messiah. These women coped with difficulties and unusual circumstances, but God’s grace touched them all. We pray His grace will touch and bless you, too, in a marvelous way this Christmas season. Merry Christmas from all of us at Israel My Glory.
Earlier this year, as I was looking back at the beginning of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, I turned to the first issue of Israel My Glory, published in December 1942—only four years after the ministry began.

Those were interesting days. The war in Europe was raging, and the outcome was anything but certain. The first issue opened a window to the times and thinking of the men who founded this work in 1938 and led it in its formative years.

Initially, we were The Friends of Israel Refugee Relief Committee because the tremendous need at the time was to help Jewish refugees who were fleeing the Holocaust and making their way to America. You might recognize some of the men on our Committee in 1942: Lewis Sperry Chafer, theologian and founding president of Dallas Theological Seminary, and Harry A. Ironside, well-known Bible teacher, author, and pastor.

As I read the first issue, it struck me that our founders felt compelled to do more than merely support the Jewish people with words. If they were to follow God’s instruction to bless the Jewish people (Gen. 12:3), they had to take action. They had to become involved in aiding God’s chosen ones.

Their decision to make the words Friends of Israel part of the ministry’s name, at a time when Israel did not exist, reveals their fervent belief that God would keep His promise to return the Jewish people to their land and fashion them again into a nation. Little did our founders know they would live to see Israel’s rebirth 10 years later. In 1938 that prospect seemed remote.

Their confidence in Israel’s future also influenced their choice of a name for the ministry’s new magazine. The inaugural issue explained why they picked Israel My Glory, from Isaiah 46:13—a name still emblazoned across each issue today:

We are naming the periodical “Israel My Glory” to call attention to the fact that God is not through with the Jewish People. He has promised that one day He will endow Israel with spiritual power and zeal and use this nation as powerful preachers when Christ comes to earth to establish His Kingdom. For 1900 years the Jews have, as a nation, rejected Christ as their Messiah. One day they will accept Him. It is difficult, therefore, for us remembering their past history, to believe that God should ever call them His “glory.” But this He has done and in naming our quarterly “Israel My Glory,” we desire to remind ourselves of God’s irrevocable promises to Israel and of His benevolent purpose in choosing them to be the human Channel through which Christ should come and the Channel also of future blessing to the world.

In 1942, The Friends of Israel’s leaders understood Israel’s centrality in God’s ultimate blessing of the earth. Their action demonstrated their faith, even though Jewish people were being killed en masse. They knew Hitler’s manic obsession was to exterminate every Jew in Europe. “Each day,” they wrote in the magazine, “brings us a new message of the unspeakable horrors, which have become their [the Jewish people’s] terrible lot. Hitler is trying hard to destroy them altogether.”

Yet The Friends of Israel leadership also knew God would not permit their annihilation. In the first issue, our founders shared how they were already making plans for a tremendous season of ministry when the war ended. They understood the needs in Europe would be great and the opportunities for ministry even greater.

All of these events occurred because a group of godly men believed God’s promises and His instruction to bless His Chosen People. Seventy-five years later, we continue what these men began, as Israel My Glory unswervingly communicates biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah.

I look back on the founders and realize if they had not acted, we would all be doing something different today. By founding The Friends of Israel, they took a stand against anti-Semitism and the hate-filled actions of Nazi Germany and began a ministry that God is still using in mighty ways.
A big Art Buchwald fan in my younger years, I’d expectantly scan the editorial pages for his usually hilarious, syndicated column that parodied some of the ridiculous aspects of current events. I thought of the late Mr. Buchwald recently and wished I had his skill when I read that Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas is angry because the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted to cut all Palestinian funding unless the PA stops rewarding Arab terrorism by paying salaries to murderers and their families.

The nerve of the United States! How dare we consider defunding an entity that prays for our demise and wants to obliterate our trusted ally, Israel? We should be ashamed of ourselves. How unfair of us to refuse to underwrite the paychecks of Arabs jailed in Israel for slashing the throats of Jewish infants asleep in their beds, ramming Israelis with cars as they shop, and stabbing innocent Jewish bystanders on the streets of Jerusalem.

The Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee has condemned the senators, calling the Taylor Force anti-terrorism bill “an unacceptable act that will negatively affect everything that is connected to the Palestinians’ rights, and particularly their right to life and protection from the occupation army’s [Israel Defense Forces’] violations.”

Now there’s a mouthful, particularly because it’s coming from an entity that routinely diverts for military purposes funds given for humanitarian aid; forces children to dig terror tunnels into Israel; and uses women and children as human shields. Several years ago Israeli soldiers rescued a mentally challenged Arab boy whom Palestinian terrorists were planning to blow to bits with a cellphone detonator after they rigged him with explosives. Right to life? What right to life?

According to The New York Post, “The Palestinian Authority is now using half of its foreign aid to reward terrorism.” That’s money, the Post said, “that’s not going to build roads or hospitals.”

How much money are we talking about? Millions. Abbas reportedly spends $355 million a year paying terrorists and their families.

How much do Palestinians receive in international foreign aid? Billions. Since the 1990s, the United States alone has provided more than $5 billion in aid. In 2016 the Palestinians received more than $357 million in American taxpayer money; and “the US contributed $355,177,827 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), of which $95 million was earmarked for the West Bank and Gaza,” reported The Times of Israel.

“UNRWA also operates Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. In total, therefore, the US gave around $712 million in aid to Palestinians in 2016, and is the world’s largest supplier of such aid,” the Times said.

But that’s not all. According to the World Bank, the West Bank and Gaza received $27.3 billion in international aid from 1993 to 2013. Yet, unlike Israel, they still have inadequate infrastructure. They have not built desalination plants. They do not treat their sewage, which flows into streams and into Israel, contaminating the aquifer. They are not developing new water sources, and they depend on Israel for water and electricity.

But they have a massive network of sophisticated terror tunnels. Those they build.

Abbas’s anger at the senators should come as no surprise. When North Korea’s Kim Jong-un threatened the United States with war in August, Abbas demonstrated his loyalties by congratulating him for his “solidarity” in opposing Israel and for North Korea’s “sacrifices” for the sake of “freedom and dignity.” What freedom? North Korea treats its citizens like slaves and is considered the worst nation in the world for extreme persecution of Christians, according to the 2017 World Watch List. The Palestinian territories rank 23rd out of 50 on the list.

Politics may make strange bedfellows, but some of us still prefer not to be useful idiots who braid the ropes that eventually hang us.

by Lorna Simcox
NO LONGER SCIENCE FICTION

When a quadcopter from the Gaza Strip landed in southern Israel recently, the Israel Defense Forces released a brief statement saying it had taken it away for checks. The seemingly mundane incident is, in fact, indicative of a growing trend: the use of drones by Israel’s enemies.

Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic State (ISIS), and others have drone programs, each at different stages and each posing threats.

Israel is a world pioneer in the use of military drones, being the first to utilize them to coordinate strikes on the battlefield in the 1980s. Today, Israel’s drone technology is a global leader, but Israel’s enemies are advancing.

Tal Inbar, head of the Space and UAV Research Center at the Fisher Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies in Herzliya, told JNS.org about two types of developing threats. The first is the enemy use of commercial drones that are accurate and can carry payloads. You also can formulate their flight plans.

In Syria, ISIS has used them to drop explosives on targets, Inbar said. But their presence alone could be used as a weapon. “If they enter a protected area, they could disrupt something like air traffic. If you’re running Ben Gurion International Airport and suddenly you see two to three quadcopters landing, you wouldn’t be giving anyone permission to take off or land,” said Inbar.

The second threat comes from the larger fixed-wing, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which Hamas and Hezbollah possess. Hamas produces fixed-wing drones in Gaza, Inbar said, and is experimenting with placing weapons under the wings.

Hezbollah imports sophisticated, Iranian-made military drones with guided rockets that can be launched at targets on the ground a few miles away. “They could, in principle, fly over Lebanon, and fire at targets in Israel,” Inbar said. “Hamas is working on achieving that capability too. The Hamas drones have rockets, but they’re not yet guided. You don’t have to be a super engineer to improve these capabilities,” he added.

Haim Haviv, head of the Integrated Electronic Warfare Systems for Mountains Terrain program at the Israeli defense company Elbit Systems, said, “We can say that capabilities once reserved for big organizations and militaries are now in the hands of smaller groups like Hamas, ISIS, and others.” These elements are using “high-performance commercial drones to gather intelligence and launch strikes at people and vehicles” on the ground, he told JNS.org.

A drone purchased on eBay arrives ready to begin gathering intelligence, he said, delivering quality visual images from afar. Dropping bombs is more complex but can be done with simple adaptations, Haviv said.

Elbit sells a defensive countermeasure called ReDrone that provides “full peripheral defense,” automatically protecting designated areas. ReDrone detects the presence of drones using its variety of sensors and blocks the radio signals and satellite transmissions the drones need to know where to fly.

Looking ahead, Haviv believes commercial drones will become involved in a growing number of security incidents. As the threat grows, interest grows from military and civilian security providers, like police forces and airports. All of them are searching for ways to defend themselves.

One day, he said, the sight of drones defending the skies against other drones may not be science fiction. “Not only is that possible, it is desirable,” said Inbar. “Patrolling the skies is a boring mission. If you can assign a UAV to do that and install a lot of ammunition on it, that would be a good thing.”

Yaakov Lappin/JNS.org

PHOTO BY M. DAHRMAN/APAIMAGES/SIPA/NEWSCOM
EGYPT—Three Egyptian military officers recently beat a Christian soldier to death for his faith and then claimed he died of natural causes.

Joseph Reda Helmy, a believer from Kafr Darwish village, had completed one month of military training when he was transferred to his unit. Upon his arrival, three officers found out about his Christian faith and killed him immediately, according to Helmy’s relatives.

The Ministry of Interior called Helmy’s cousin, Youssef Zarif, to come retrieve the body. When Zarif arrived, the army told him Helmy had died of an epileptic seizure; but his body bore signs of a violent death. Bruises covered his head, shoulders, neck, back, and genitalia.

Zarif refused to believe the army’s explanation, claiming Helmy had been a healthy young man and that his bruises did not resemble those of an epileptic episode.

Refusing to bow to the army’s pressure, the doctor who examined the body also determined the death was not due to natural causes. The prosecutor concurred and demanded an official investigation, which revealed the three officers harassed and killed Helmy because of his Christian faith by kicking him with their boots and hitting him with heavy instruments.

A Christian leader from Helmy’s home village told Morning Star News that villagers are mourning his martyr’s death. “Many women are wearing black, a sign of mourning for the death of one of their Coptic youth. Many are sharing the graphic pictures of the bruised body of Joseph Reda Helmy, a new draftee doing his military service,” he said.

Sadly, Helmy is not the only Egyptian soldier who has died for his faith. Several others have been killed while serving in Egypt’s military.

Last year, the military informed the family of 22-year-old Michael Gamel Mansour that he had committed suicide by shooting himself with a rifle. Authorities claimed he had become despondent after a telephone conversation with his family.

But Mansour’s family said he had exhibited no signs of suicide, left no suicide note, and that the telephone call was about innocuous issues. Mansour was the third Christian soldier in nine months whom the Egyptian government claimed committed suicide.

In November 2015, the Egyptian military told Nataay Boushra his son, Bishoy Nataay Boushra, had committed suicide in the bathroom of a military jail cell. Boushra was incarcerated for defending himself against the repeated attacks by a Muslim soldier.

For months before he retaliated, Boushra endured threats, violence, intense verbal abuse, and public humiliation for his faith, Boushra’s father said. When Boushra finally picked up a stick to defend himself, he and his attacker landed in jail.

Three weeks later, Nataay learned his son had died. Boushra’s family refused to believe the government’s story, claiming Boushra had been a devout Christian who believed suicide was a grave sin. Furthermore, he had exhibited no signs of depression.

The military officially ruled on Boushra’s death before it even conducted an autopsy. Later, when the family retrieved Boushra’s body, they demanded an autopsy. The examination revealed ligature marks consistent with a hanging or strangling death and huge bruises and welts on his torso from sustained, brutal beatings.

Egypt ranks 21st on Open Doors’ 2017 World Watch List of the 50 countries where Christians experience the worst persecution.

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Have you ever read a Scripture verse you had read many times before, but suddenly it seemed brand new to you? I have. I call it a Wow! moment. My most recent Wow! moment came after reading Judges 11: “And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, ‘Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those lands peaceably’” (v. 13).

More than 3,000 years ago, the king of Ammon accused Israel of taking “his” land, and he wanted it back—or else. Wow! Israel was accused of stealing land and told to give it back. That scenario reverberates almost daily. At its core lies bad history because it wasn’t true then, and it isn’t true today.

The Ammonites attacked Israel (v. 5). Jephthah, Israel’s judge/leader, tried diplomacy first to keep the peace. He sent messengers to their king, asking him why he wanted to fight (v. 12). That’s when the king accused Israel of stealing land (v. 13).

Jephthah addressed the king’s false narrative by sending messengers to give the king the truth about Israel’s existence in the land. When the Israelites had left Egypt, they had asked permission to pass through other kingdoms. The land in question was territory Israel had won in a battle 300 years earlier, when attacked by the Amorites, not the Ammonites (v. 26).

Jephthah told the king the real story: “Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon” (v. 15). However, neither Jephthah’s diplomacy nor his facts prevailed. Israel was forced to defend itself. In this case, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah,” and Israel was victorious (v. 29).

**WATERSHED EVENTS**

This year marks the anniversary of several events in Israel’s history that correct the more modern narrative that Israel is a land-grabber and demonstrate Israel’s respect for international law, diplomacy, and proper use of defense.

**First Zionist Congress.** It is the 120th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress that met in Basel, Switzerland. At that time Theodor Herzl wrote in his diary, “At Basel, I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years, certainly in 50, everyone will know it.” The meeting motivated Jewish people around the world to raise money to pay the exorbitant prices absentee landowners were demanding for territory in the Holy Land, which at that point was part of the Ottoman Empire. The effort facilitated the first Aliyah (return to Israel).

**Balfour Declaration.** It is the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, which declared the British government’s favorable disposition toward “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” It promised Britain’s “best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may
prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.” The emphasis on following international law was a primary consideration in establishing Israel as a state.

**United Nations Resolution 181.** Seventy years ago, on November 29, 1947, the UN partitioned Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. Israel accepted the plan; the Arabs rejected it and attacked Israel instead. The plan has formed the basis for a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and for the 1993 Oslo accords.

**Khartoum Resolution.** Fifty years ago, several months after the Six-Day War in which Israel soundly defeated its enemies, Israel offered to discuss peace. However, the 1967 Arab League summit met in Khartoum, Sudan, presented a seven-point resolution, and issued its three famous “Nos.” Item 3 states, “The Arab Heads of State have agreed to unite their political efforts at the international and diplomatic level to eliminate the effects of the aggression and to ensure the withdrawal of the aggressive Israeli forces from the Arab lands which have been occupied since the aggression of June 5. This will be done within the framework of the main principles by which the Arab States abide, namely, no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it, and insistence on the rights of the Palestinian people in their own country” (emphasis added).

Israel’s enemies act like the king of Ammon, claiming Israel has stolen land.

**THE NARRATIVE CONTINUES**

In December 2016, Newsweek magazine ran an article by Diana Buttu, “Why the World Must Act to Stop Israel’s Insatiable Appetite for Palestinian Land.” Buttu wrote, “And yet, while recognizing that Israel’s desire for Greater Israel has only served to oppress Palestinians, the U.S. administration continues to cling to the same, tired formula—that of bilateral talks—instead of pressing Israel to stop its land theft.”

In May, The Economist, a respected, 173-year-old London periodical, ran a special report on Israel for the 50th anniversary of the Six-Day War. The cover pictured a Star of David with a Palestinian flag-covered lock clamped onto the star. Inside the star were the words Why Israel needs a Palestinian state. The special report began with the headline, “Six days of war, 50 years of occupation.” The implication perpetuates the Arab narrative that Israel steals land.

Telling the true story was radio host Larry Elder, who wrote some years ago “The Truth About Israel’s ‘Stolen’ Land” in wnd.com. He supplied an accurate history of the situation and concluded,

The word “Palestinian,” as employed today, is a relatively recent term. Until the end of the British mandate over Palestine, in 1948, all inhabitants of the area west of the Jordan River were known as “Palestinians.” A Jewish person living in what is now Israel was a “Palestinian Jew.” An Arab living in the area was a “Palestinian Arab.” Likewise, a Christian was known as a “Palestinian Christian.” Israel won more land after a series of wars, land since returned or offered for return in exchange for peace. The Jews “stole” nothing.³

As a judge of Israel, Jephthah was forced to fight against the Ammonites because they got history wrong. Today Israel is forced to defend itself against its legion of enemies who purposely make history wrong.

Sadly, history repeats itself. Would to God that people accusing Israel of land grabbing have their own Wow! moment.

**ENDNOTES**


Steve Herzig
is the director of North American Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.
Even the most unlikely situation can become a vehicle for God’s grace, as it did with Tamar.

UNBROKEN LINE

by Peter Colón
THE STORY OF TAMAR AS RECORDED IN GENESIS 38 IS BOTH SORDID AND TRAGIC.

Many readers consider the narrative indecent, and some even suggest it should never be read in public. No matter how we look at it, we know God included it in Scripture for a reason.

Tamar lived in the era before God gave the Mosaic Law, in a society dominated by strict family tribal rules and pre-Levirate customs. If a woman’s husband died without offspring, his brother was to marry her to produce a son as the legal heir of the deceased husband. Around this custom, which later became part of the Mosaic Law, revolves Tamar’s story.

It is one of rejection, radicalism, and righteousness. Her in-laws rejected her; she acted radically to gain that which was rightfully hers; and in the end, she was deemed righteous.

Many view Tamar as a woman of integrity because she risked her life to fulfill her duty to herself and her family. However, she unwittingly performed an even more important task. God used her to preserve the Messianic line because, without the birth of her son Perez, the line from Judah to David would have been broken.¹

REJECTION

The Bible’s account begins after Judah, one of Jacob’s 12 sons, moved to the Canaanite royal city of Adullum. There he married a Canaanite woman named Shua, and she bore him three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah (Gen. 38:1–5).

Judah arranged for Er, his eldest son, to marry Tamar. At some point, Er behaved wickedly before the Lord, so the Lord killed him (vv. 6–7). In accordance with a Levirate-marriage custom, Judah instructed his second son, Onan, to marry Tamar so he could produce an heir for Er. But Onan, knowing the child would not be his legally, refused. So the Lord killed him also (vv. 8–10).

Then Judah told Tamar to return to her parents’ home and remain a widow until his third son, Shelah, became old enough to marry. But fearing he might lose his youngest son as well, Judah rejected Tamar in his heart and had no intention of keeping his promise to give her Shelah.

Tamar, however, believed Judah and obediently returned to her father’s home (v. 11). She remained faithful to the restrictions placed on her and awaited the fulfillment of her legal right to bear children in Judah’s family.

RADICALISM

Years passed, Shelah reached marrying age, and still Judah made no plans for him to marry Tamar. Realizing Judah had lied to her, Tamar became desperate and devised a radical plan. She received word that Judah was traveling to the city of Timnah with his friend Hirah the Adullamite to supervise the shearing of his sheep. (Judah’s wife had died, and his time of mourning for her was complete.) So Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute, veiled her face, and sat by the entrance gate of the town (vv. 12–14).

As expected, Judah noticed her and solicited her services, not knowing she was Tamar. He promised to send her a goat for payment and granted her request to leave his signet, cord, and staff as collateral (vv. 15–18).

Tragically, Judah apparently failed to see the significant connection to his past conduct. Tamar probably knew Judah’s father (Jacob)
had deceived his father (Isaac) to obtain the blessing that rightfully was his (27:18–24). And she probably knew about Judah’s role in tricking Jacob into believing a wild beast had devoured Jacob’s youngest son (Joseph) when, in reality, Judah and his brothers had sold Joseph into slavery. That deception, too, involved a goat and a personal item—Joseph’s “tunic of many colors” (37:31–35).

Galatians 6:7 warns, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” Judah had sown deception, and he was about to reap deception.

Judah slept with Tamar, and she became pregnant. After their encounter, she returned home, removed her veil, and again wore her widow garments. When Judah sent his friend to deliver the goat and retrieve his personal items, Tamar was nowhere to be found; and no one knew of any prostitutes in the area. Judah told Hirah to forget the matter and let the woman keep the objects to avoid further humiliation (Gen. 38:18–23).

Righteousness
Three months later, someone told Judah Tamar was pregnant. Infuriated, he demanded, “Bring her out and let her be burned!” (v. 24).

As they dragged her out, she sent a message to Judah: “By the man to whom these belong, I am with child. . . . Please determine whose these are—the signet and cord, and staff” (v. 25).

Hebrew scholars have interpreted Tamar as saying, “I beg of thee, discern the face of thy creator and hide not thine eyes from me,” appealing to Judah to judge honestly before God and to seek her welfare. The sages observed she could have pointed to Judah in front of his peers and declared, “He made me pregnant!”

Instead, by presenting Judah’s items and not mentioning his name, Tamar showed her willingness to die rather than shame him publicly, revealing her righteous demeanor (cf. Talmud Sotah 10b). Judah acknowledged Tamar had acted more righteously than he. “She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son,” Judah said (Gen. 38:26).

The Jewish sages believed the account reflected well on Judah, since he eventually confessed his sin against Tamar: “Since Judah confessed to his error sincerely, this is a sign of righteousness and so the story of Tamar is read and explained” (Mishnah Megillah 4:10; cf. Gen. 38:26). Other people have different views. However, there can be no doubt that God shed His grace on Tamar because she gave birth to twin boys, Perez and Zerah, from whom came King David and then Jesus (Ruth 4:18–22; Mt. 1:3, 16).

Tamar may not have understood all the divine promises associated with Judah’s family. But she understood her right to remarry, bear children, and partake in Judah’s heritage. Although rejected by Judah, she sought inclusion with Israel. Perhaps unaware, she was indeed “standing on the promises of God.” And God accepted her.

Generations later, when Boaz was about to marry Ruth the Moabitess in a Levirate marriage, the elders of Bethlehem gave him this blessing: “May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the L ORD will give you from this young woman” (Ruth 4:12). Tamar had become associated with God’s blessing.

Despite the dubious method used, the incident demonstrates God’s perfect management of the Messianic line. The rabbis taught that when Tamar asked Judah for his signet, cord, and staff, she spoke prophetically. The signet expressed the many kings who would descend from the line of Judah and Tamar. The cord suggested the authority that would be exhibited by Israel’s many rulers. And the staff signified the coming of the King-Messiah through their lineage.

Genesis 49:10 predicted the Messiah would come through the tribe of Judah: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”

Though we would not prefer an incident like this one to be associated with God’s people—let alone the Savior of the world—the account of Judah and Tamar provides a glimpse of God’s amazing graciousness and goodness. “The L ORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Ps. 145:9). ☀

ENDNOTE


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HOW THE GREAT I
REDEEMED
BY RICHARD D. EMMONS
Few people hang skeletons on their front doors. But that’s exactly what the New Testament does. The book of Matthew opens with the genealogy of Jesus, which includes five women, four of whom many would consider skeletons better kept in the closet. One of these women is Rahab.

Salmon, destined to become King David’s great-great-grandfather, married Rahab, who gave birth to Boaz, who became the husband of Ruth. These people form part of the royal genealogy of Jesus Christ and demonstrate how God’s magnificent grace knows no limits.

Who was Rahab? She first appears in the book of Joshua. After 40 years in the wilderness, Israel was ready to take possession of the Promised Land. Jericho was the first target. Joshua, Moses’ successor, sent two men to spy out the city secretly; and they “came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there” (Josh. 2:1).

When the king found out about them, their lives were in danger. So Rahab hid the two men among the stalks of flax on her roof. When asked about their whereabouts, she lied: “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. . . . Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them” (vv. 4–5).

Based on what she told the spies, it seems she had come to believe in the God of Israel:

“I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. . . . for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father’s house, and . . . spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.”

So the men answered her, “Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the Lord has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you” (vv. 9, 11–14).
The Israelites kept their promise. After ordering Jericho’s destruction, Joshua spared Rahab and her entire family. In fact, Rahab married into the most prominent family of Judah. Yet we see three challenges with her prominence in the New Testament—reasons why she would seem like a skeleton in a closet.

#1 RAHAB’S PROFESSION

Rahab was a prostitute. Some commentators seek to resolve this issue by noting that the Hebrew term bayith-ishshah, which literally means “house-woman,” could mean “innkeeper.” The word translated “harlot” (zona, from the root zanah, which normally means “to act as a harlot or commit fornication”) could indicate a woman having legitimate commercial associations with men.1 However, this would be the only such meaning of the term in the entire Old Testament. All of the other nearly 100 occurrences of the zanah word family clearly mean physical or spiritual harlotry. The New Testament associates the word porne with Rahab, which means “prostitute,” settling the issue for those of us who accept the authority of the New Testament (Heb. 11:31; Jas. 2:25).

How does a person with such a sordid past end up in the genealogical line of Israel’s royal family? The answer is the grace of God. For the last 6,000 years, God has taken great delight in transforming lives. He loves to display His glory by manifesting His grace in the least likely of candidates.

Imagine the pure joy of the apostle Paul, who called himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), when he wrote that God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:4–6). We should rejoice over this transforming grace every day!

#2 RAHAB’S POSITION

How is it that Rahab became a mother of Israel? She was a Canaanite prostitute. Yet quite unexpectedly—particularly to the Jewish readers for whom Matthew’s Gospel was originally intended—she appears in the royal line of Israel’s Messiah, the Savior of the world:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king (Mt. 1:1–6).

Beyond the events of the conquest of Jericho, Rahab is not mentioned in the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. Other uses of the word appear, but they do not refer to her. The final reference is in Joshua 6:25: “And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father’s household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.”

Other than stating “she dwells in Israel to this day,” the Old Testament provides no direct indication of Rahab’s fate. The Jewish genealogies mention the family into which she married, but they never mention her. The only direct indication of her inclusion in the royal line comes in Matthew 1.

Her son Boaz was a key player in the book of Ruth. What a godly son she reared. This wealthy, righteous leader in Bethlehem was a respected businessman who showed compassion for Ruth, a widowed, downtrodden foreigner.

Rahab never could have known how her decision to aid the Israelite spies would impact the future of the world. God took this formerly pagan woman and inserted her directly into the genealogy of His beloved Son.

How many women have reared godly children in similar anonymity? How many women are asked to rear godly children in similar anonymity today?
When we serve the Lord in ways the world cannot see, we can be encouraged that He records (and eventually rewards) every act of devotion.

#3 RAHAB'S PROMOTION

Not only is Rahab placed in Jesus’ genealogy as a respected mother of Israel on the very first page of the New Testament, but she also is promoted in status as an icon of the faith. The book of Hebrews places her alongside spiritual giants (11:31). And the book of James associates her with what may be the greatest example of faith in the Hebrew Scriptures: Abraham's willingness to sacrifice to God his son Isaac. Both passages use Rahab's action as an illustration of the true nature of faith.

However, there are two problems here: How could Rahab express faith while breaking the ninth commandment? Her faith was executed through the lie she told to protect the spies. And how could James say she was justified by works? “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?” (Jas. 2:25).

The answer to the first question is that new believers sometimes express their faith while breaking the ninth commandment? Her faith was executed through the lie she told to protect the spies. And how could James say she was justified by works? “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?” (Jas. 2:25).

The answer to the first question is that new believers sometimes express their faith through what may seem crude behavior to mature believers. Lying is always wrong. There is no such thing as an acceptable lie. But Rahab did what she probably had done hundreds of times: She lied to protect herself. New believers sometimes lie or take God's name in vain, even when trying to serve Him. Such behavior is always wrong. The apostle Paul made it clear that we all must continue the process of God's gracious transformation: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

Each of us had a starting point. When we become more like Christ, we should lose the habits and values that contradict God's Word.

As for being “justified by works,” we must understand James's reasoning. He was not talking about the faith that saves us from sin but, rather, the faith that delivers (saves) us from failing the trials that come into our lives (Jas. 1:2–18). In James 2, the trial (testing of our faith) is how we react to a wealthy man who comes into our assembly. Do we treat him better than a poor man? Our behavior exposes our faith—or lack of it. In this context, people are justified by works (v. 18).

James noted the difference between Abraham's justification from sin (Gen. 15:6) and his experience in Genesis 22 (approximately 40 years later), when he was justified by works (Jas. 2:21). His willingness to sacrifice Isaac enabled him to pass the test God had given him (Heb. 11:17–19).
I’d like to tell you about a girl who grew up 30 centuries ago and made a decision so momentous it not only secured her place in history but also the future of mankind—including yours and mine. She probably never knew the significance of her choice on that ordinary day on the road to Judah.

She grew up in Moab, east of Israel and the Dead Sea, where Jordan lies today. The Moabites worshiped Chemosh, an evil god of their own invention and to whom they sacrificed their children in a religion that traded on human depravity, corruption, and fear.

Into this culture was born Ruth. Did she sleep securely at night? Or did she lie on her little pallet, fearfully envisioning a favorite cousin screaming or a playmate being torn from her mother and offered to Chemosh? Was a sibling of hers taken for a sacrifice? As she matured, did she witness anything to make her question the belief system of her people?

We’ll never know, of course. But this was the pagan culture of Ruth’s youth. She was a Moabitess who likely knew no other way to live.

Enter the Israelites

As time passed, four people entered her world. They had traveled to Moab from Bethlehem Ephrathah in Israel to escape the famine that was ravaging the land. The family consisted of Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, and their sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Elimelech may have been a devout believer in Yahweh, and Naomi may have been pleasant and fun because their names mean “my God is King” and “pleasant,” respectively.

After a while, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi alone with her two sons (Ruth 1:3). If their names characterized them, Mahlon was sickly because his name meant “sick,” and Chilion was a complainer because his name meant “pining.” Yet Ruth and Orpah married them. Ruth wed Mahlon, Orpah wed Chilion, and pleasant Naomi became their mother-in-law.

During the 10 years her sons were married, Naomi may have treated her daughters-in-law to fascinating accounts about her homeland and her God, the One who created the universe in six days and made a dry path through the Red Sea so her people could flee from slavery in Egypt.

Perhaps she told them how God had fed the Israelites with manna from heaven and made water gush from a rock. Or how He made the walls of Jericho, on the other side of the Dead Sea, collapse in a heap.

Naomi worshiped the God who provided commandments designed to help people and keep them from hurting one another. Chemosh, on the other hand, didn’t provide anything. All he did was receive the charred bodies of innocent children.

Then tragedy struck. Mahlon and Chilion died. Now each of the women stood by a grave in Moab. Alone, with no one to support them, they faced destitution.

Entreat me not

In the ensuing days, Naomi heard the Lord had visited His people with bread. The famine was over. God was blessing her homeland, and she wanted to return to Bethlehem.

Ruth and Orpah no doubt loved their mother-in-law and immediately agreed to accompany her. Naomi was touched. She apparently loved these girls, as well. However, if they left Moab, they would become the foreigners. How could she wish that situation on them? “Go, return each to her mother’s house,” she implored. “The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me” (v. 8).

Naomi was telling them to turn around and go back to their childhood homes. Her wish was for them to remarry and for the God of Israel to grant them rest. She kissed them tenderly, “and they lifted up their voices and wept” (v. 9).

Still, they did not want to leave her: “Surely we will return with you to your people,” they begged (v. 10).

But Naomi told the girls she could not provide more sons for them to marry. She finished her second entreaty to them with a heartbreaking cry of grief, accusing her God of going out against her (v. 13). Sobbing, Orpah kissed Naomi goodbye. But Ruth clung to her. The words that poured from Ruth’s soul are among the most beautiful in all of Scripture. They not only reveal her devotion to Naomi but her willingness to submit her life to the God of Israel:

Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me (vv. 16–17).

In a surprising declaration, Ruth invoked the proper name of the world’s one true God, Yahweh (LORD), “the existing one,” and promised, “The Lord do so to me and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.” It seems that Ruth had come to know God.
Naomi slowly released herself from Ruth’s embrace. She probably noted the swollen eyes, red with pleading and agony. Perhaps she even reached her wrinkled hand up and cupped Ruth’s face, her cheeks stained with tears and grime from the road. I like to think the older woman smiled, hooked her arm through Ruth’s, and headed resolutely in the direction of Bethlehem.

THE BLESSING OF SURRENDER
Young Ruth’s decision on that dusty road millennia ago was one of complete surrender—not only to Naomi, but also to the God of Israel. It equaled a declaration of love (though the word love never appears in the book of Ruth, despite the fact that love pervades every chapter).

Did Ruth have any idea her commitment would continue a series of events that started in eternity past and would affect the entirety of civilization? Did she know that hundreds of years earlier, when God promised Abraham all families of the earth would be blessed through his seed, that she would have anything to do with that blessing? She was a foreigner to the covenant nation of Israel, a widow, a Moabite, and a Gentile.

Did Ruth know that by submitting to Yahweh, she would be maneuvered into the sphere of a kind, wealthy man named Boaz, a relative of Naomi’s, who would become their kinsman-redeemer and restore their heritage? Did she know her future great-grandson, David, was destined to become the great king of Israel and father of the royal line of Jesus the Messiah and Savior of the world?

Ruth knew none of these things. Yet they all occurred because of her unconditional surrender to the true and living God on a dusty road in Moab.

Ruth is a hero to me. I love her because, as a Gentile, she was a lot like me: She was spiritually destitute, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, hopeless and godless and living in spiritual poverty (Eph. 2:12).

Then, through Messiah Jesus, who provides forgiveness of sin through faith in Him, we Gentiles are grafted into the blessings of righteousness that God has provided for His Chosen People, Israel. The victory sings in our hearts:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you [Gentiles] are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (vv. 13–14, 18–19).

Ruth’s decision led her into God’s family. It sealed her into the Messianic line that would produce the Savior of the world. She had no idea how significant her choice would be.

Ruth’s life sings to me. I want to be like her. I want to surrender everything I am, all my life, to God. I can do so because Ruth’s descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, shed His blood and surrendered His life for me.*

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GOD is the author of history; it’s His story. In God’s sovereign plan, He “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11). That’s why some call God’s providence “the hand of God in the glove of history.”

But how do the stories of our individual lives fit into God’s story? Bathsheba must have wondered about that often as her dramatic life unfolded. And though she is associated with King David’s greatest sin, her name appears prominently in the lineage of Israel’s King-Messiah.

Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam, one of David’s elite, mighty men (2 Sam. 11:3; cf. 23:34–39). She married one of Eliam’s comrades, Uriah the Hittite, who was also a mighty soldier in David’s fighting force. Though Scripture often refers to Uriah as “the Hittite,” he probably bonded to David and became a proselyte, believing in David’s God.

Scripture’s first reference to Bathsheba describes her as beautiful and the focus of King David’s gaze while he took an evening walk on his palace rooftop and saw her bathing. Her beauty transfixed him, and he sent someone to find out who she was.

Even after he learned she was Uriah’s wife, David sent messengers to take her, “and she came to him, and he lay with her” (11:4).

This incident has fascinated Hollywood and spawned endless speculation about Bathsheba’s culpability. Did she know David could see her bathing, or did she assume he was away in battle, as he usually was? Once summoned, could she have resisted
David’s advances, or was she merely a pawn in an ancient society dominated by men?

The Bible fails to blame Bathsheba, but it strongly condemns David. In fact, David would suffer the rest of his life for his lustful choice. So would Bathsheba, David’s family, and the entire nation of Israel.

**Bathsheba Becomes a Widow**

When Bathsheba sent word to David that she was pregnant, David hatched a plan so cold-blooded we can hardly believe he was “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). His treachery proves that even the godliest people are sinners; and though God forgives the truly repentant, the consequences of sin linger on.

David summoned Uriah from the battlefield and encouraged him to return home and sleep with his wife. When Uriah nobly refused, David tried again the next night by getting him drunk. When that plan failed, David sent Uriah back into battle with a letter for Joab, the captain of David’s army. The letter contained Uriah’s death sentence: “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die” (2 Sam. 11:15). The plot succeeded, and Uriah was killed.

Bathsheba became a widow and mourned for her husband (v. 26). When her mourning was over, she became David’s wife and bore him a son. “But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord” (v. 27).

**Bathsheba’s Roller-Coaster Life**

Nine months passed before David repented. The prophet Nathan’s poignant confrontation led to his confession: “I have sinned against the Lord” (12:13).

Nathan told David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die” (vv. 13–14). The infant soon became ill and died, despite David’s heartfelt intercession before God for seven days.

Few things hurt more than losing a child. Bathsheba’s heart no doubt was broken. David comforted her, and she conceived another son, whom David named Solomon. The Bible tells us, “The Lord loved him, and He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord” (vv. 24–25). Jedidiah means “beloved of the Lord.”

How merciful and gracious is our God. Though He punished David, He did not withhold His love from him or from Bathsheba and their child. And He did
not renege on His promise to establish David's line forever. In fact, God would pick Solomon to carry on the kingly line of David, in keeping with the Davidic Covenant (cf. 7:12–13). Bathsheba bore David three more sons, but Solomon was uniquely chosen.

Bathsheba spent the remainder of her life in the palace, tossed about by the consequences of David's sin with her. Her life was a roller coaster of history-shaping events. God had promised David a life of “adversity” and vowed the sword would “never depart from [his] house” as punishment for what he had done (12:10–11).

Among the most painful of those adversities was the rebellion of David's son Absalom. Bathsheba's grandfather, Ahithophel, joined Absalom to fight against David (15:31; cf. 11:3; 23:34). Many speculate Ahithophel turned against David as revenge for David's seduction of his granddaughter and murder of her husband. Imagine how Bathsheba felt when she heard her grandfather had committed suicide after Absalom spurned his counsel and Ahithopel realized David's victory was likely (17:23). Our lives can be full of painful disappointments.

As David advanced in age and neared his death, Bathsheba became influential in the royal court (1 Ki. 1—2). One day Nathan approached her to tell her that David’s son Adonijah was preparing to make himself king. The prophet urged Bathsheba, “Go immediately to King David and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord, O king, swear to your maidservant, saying, “Assuredly your son Solomon shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne”? Why then has Adonijah become king?'” (1:13).

Bathsheba heeded Nathan’s advice. David respected Bathsheba and immediately ordered Solomon’s coronation, thwarting Adonijah’s short-lived rebellion.

After David’s death, Bathsheba remained a respected influence on her son King Solomon. Though he did not always grant his mother’s requests, he respectfully bowed to her and placed a throne for her beside his (2:19–24).

Bathsheba knew God’s story included Solomon carrying on King David’s royal line, which would somehow continue “forever” (2 Sam. 7:12–13). But she did not know just how far it would take her story: Bathsheba would become part of the Messianic line.

WHAT A GOD!
The New Testament begins with a genealogy, harkening back to God’s promise in Genesis 3:15 to send the “seed” of a woman—the Redeemer—to crush Satan and the sin he caused. The Old Testament proclaimed, “He's coming!” and provided information about this promised Savior. The New Testament declares, “He’s here! His name is Jesus, and He is from the correct promised line—the line of David and Abraham” (cf. Mt. 1:1).

Against Jewish protocol, Matthew’s genealogy includes five women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, “her who had been the wife of Uriah,” and Mary (vv. 3–16). All were trophies of God’s grace. Their inclusion emphasizes the truth of Jesus’ name—“Salvation.” He came to “save His people from their sins” (v. 21).

What a God! He is writing His grand story. Ephesians 1:11–12 says God “works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.” God receives glory by displaying His grace—His undeserved kindness to people who deserve punishment.

We all deserve punishment because we all are sinners. As Bathsheba’s son Solomon wrote, “There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Eccl. 7:20). We need a Redeemer to remove our sin so we can face a holy, righteous God.

Like Bathsheba, we need God’s mercy and grace. And there is no better time to ask God for it than at Christmas, when we celebrate the advent of His Son, the One who came specifically to bear our sin and set us free (Isa. 53:5).
While waiting to check out at the grocery store recently, a publication caught my eye. It was a reissue of LIFE magazine on Mary, the mother of Jesus. I began to peruse it, more out of curiosity than interest, until I read the introduction: “Whoever she [Mary] was, she must have been substantial, smart and strong. She must have been a fine mother.” True. But she was also much more.

Of all the women in the world, Mary was handpicked by God to be the vehicle to bring Israel’s Messiah into the world. For centuries Israel had awaited the Redeemer spoken of by the prophets. Then one day, God sent the angel Gabriel to a young woman in Nazareth whose profound faith and royal lineage made her the perfect vessel for His use. Gabriel told Mary, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you: blessed are you among women” (Lk. 1:28).

Unfortunately, much misinformation surrounds this blessed woman. What do we know about her that isn’t based on misconceptions and church folklore?

**HER BACKGROUND**

First, Mary was Jewish. My wife, who grew up Jewish, was practically a teenager before she discovered Mary wasn’t Catholic. There were no Roman Catholics in Mary’s time. There were only Jews—who worshiped the true and living God—and pagans, who worshiped idols.

Second, Mary was a direct descendant of King David through Bathsheba’s son Nathan, from the tribe of Judah. Her lineage is recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Mary’s husband, Joseph, descended from David and Bathsheba’s son Solomon. He was the royal heir to a throne that had been desolate for almost 600 years. When Caesar Augustus decreed that people were to return to their ancestral homes for taxation purposes, both Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem, David’s hometown (1 Sam. 16:1, 4).

By then, thousands of years had passed since the Lord had promised to send a Redeemer through the “Seed” of a woman to crush the head of Satan, the serpent (Gen. 3:15). As biblical revelation unfolded, the promise came to rest squarely on a female descendant of David who would (1) be a virgin (Isa. 7:14), (2) bear a Son (v. 14), and (3) deliver that Son in Bethlehem Ephrathah (Mic. 5:2).

Mary’s real name would have been Miriam. Wrote Bible scholar Dr. Victor Buksbazen, “‘Miriam’ was her true biblical name in Hebrew. ‘Mary’ is the modern English version of the name ‘Miriam.’”

As for her age, some speculate she was 12 to 15 and that Joseph was an older widower with children. However, Scripture provides no basis for this theory. Nothing indicates Joseph was much older than Mary or that he was previously married. And sound Bible
HER KNOWLEDGE
Mary clearly knew the Hebrew Scriptures and believed them. Nevertheless, when she saw the angel, she was “troubled,” or alarmed (Lk. 1:29). Of course she was troubled! Prior to an angel appearing to the priest Zacharias approximately six months earlier, there had been no prophetic vision, utterance, or prophet in Israel for 400 years. Then Gabriel told Mary,

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God (vv. 31–33, 35).

What a proclamation! Mary’s son would reestablish the Israelite kingdom and reign on David’s throne forever. He would be the Messianic hope her people had cherished since the days of the patriarchs. “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” she asked (v. 34). Gabriel told her the Holy Spirit would “overshadow” her, and “that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (v. 35).

Her response showed her absolute trust in the God of Israel: “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (v. 38).

HER MAGNIFICAT
Mary then went to the hill country of Judea to visit her elderly, pregnant cousin Elizabeth, Zacharias’s wife. When Elizabeth “heard the greeting of Mary, . . . the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Lk. 1:41, 43, 45).

Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John the Baptist (v. 36). Her greeting confirmed Gabriel’s message to Mary and probably encouraged her. However, Scripture does not tell us Mary was yet pregnant. It merely says Elizabeth called her “the mother of my Lord” because the Holy Spirit prompted her to do so.

Mary’s response to Elizabeth has been called the “Magnificat” from the first word of the Latin translation. This beautiful passage (vv. 46–55) is actually a poem that begins with Mary’s astounding declaration of unconditional love for and trust in the Lord: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior” (vv. 46–47).

These 10 verses include at least 15 clear references from the Jewish Scriptures, the only Bible that existed in Mary’s day. She referred to God as “my Savior,” acknowledging her need of salvation. She praised His regard for “the lowly state of His maidservant,” acknowledging her subservience to the Almighty and what probably was her lower-class status in Israelite society. She and Joseph were so poor they could only offer a pair of turtledoves as a sacrifice when they dedicated Jesus at the Temple (2:24; cf. Lev. 12:8).

She also extolled God’s might (Lk. 1:49), mercy (v. 50), strength (v. 51), judgment of the proud (vv. 51–52), exaltation of the lowly (v. 52), and salvation of Israel (vv. 54–55). Her profound faith in God and His faithfulness, along with her knowledge of Scripture, makes it easy to see why God chose her.

CLEARING UP MISCONCEPTIONS
Because much unbiblical doctrine revolves around Mary, it’s important to examine God’s Word to avoid being misled.

Nowhere does the Bible teach that Mary was immaculately conceived, that she remained a virgin in perpetuity, that she was assumed into heaven, or that she is a coredeemptrix in the salvation of lost humanity. The Bible teaches that only Jesus came to Earth as God incarnate to redeem mankind from sin, in fulfillment of what the Jewish prophets foretold.

Nor does the Bible teach that Mary assumed attributes of deity upon her death. Only God is omniscient and omnipresent, so He alone can hear and answer prayer and know everything transpiring on Earth. The Bible teaches we are to worship and pray to God alone.

At this time of year, we also hear sermons speculating that people probably whispered about Mary because she was pregnant out of wedlock. However, Scripture teaches the opposite: “Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly” (Mt. 1:19). Clearly, she was not already a public example, and Joseph was planning to ensure she did not become one.

Jesus also read the Torah in the synagogue, a privilege withheld from men considered illegitimate. Plus, people said of Jesus, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter’s son?” (13:54–55). Clearly, His parentage was not an issue. Furthermore, it was important that Jesus be regarded as Joseph’s legitimate son because through Joseph came the legal right to David’s throne. Scripture also teaches Mary had other children after Jesus (vv. 55–56).

Mary probably was indeed a “fine mother.” But she was a finer example of what it means to have faith in God.

ENDNOTES
1 “His—And Everyone’s Mother,” LIFE, 17, no. 7 (April 14, 2017), 6.

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Why Jesus’ birth can’t be explained apart from the supernatural intervention of God

by J. Christopher Smith
The Making of a Miracle
My wife made a casual remark last Christmas that has stuck with me. We were thinking about all of the family members we were expecting on Christmas day and all of the presents we needed to place underneath our tree when she observed, “There are so many presents there will not be room for Jesus.” Her comment captured Christmas in America today. Most people are so focused on the material aspects they have no room for the Savior.

Since our culture largely rejects belief in God and, therefore, the possibility of a God-caused event, it rejects the Bible’s account of Jesus’ birth. Yet some things cannot be explained apart from the supernatural intervention of God; and Jesus’ birth clearly falls into that category, beginning with the miraculous preservation of the Messianic line.

**Abraham Lincoln**

In ancient days, a family lineage was of great importance to a Jewish family, so it’s not surprising to find in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke the genealogy of the Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel. Whoever the Redeemer was, He needed to be able to prove His right to be the Messiah through his lineage.

Matthew’s genealogy follows the line of Mary’s husband, Joseph, establishing the Lord’s paternity all the way back to King David and Abraham. Luke’s follows His mother Mary’s connection all the way to Adam. And both genealogies run through David to establish Jesus’ rightful claim to the Davidic throne.

Most people don’t realize the enormity of the miracle involved in preserving Christ’s lineage for more than 2,000 years. God had to guarantee the presence of a male descendant in every generation, ultimately culminating in the birth of the Lord Jesus.

We may think, *No big deal. A lot of men can trace their lineage back hundreds of years.* The difference, however, is that God told the world His Son would be born thousands of years before it happened. Then He had to ensure the proper descendants to produce the promised Messiah.

Think about this way. U.S. President Abraham Lincoln had four children, all sons: Robert Todd Lincoln, Edward Baker Lincoln, William Wallace Lincoln, and Thomas Lincoln. Of those four sons, one died in infancy. Another died as a youth. A third died in early manhood, before he was married.

The only one of President Lincoln’s sons to marry was Robert Todd, and he had three children: two daughters and a son. His son died in 1890, before he ever married. So in less than three generations—approximately 100 years from the time Lincoln was born—Lincoln’s direct male line had disappeared. It is impossible for anyone today to claim to be a great-great-great-grandson of Abraham Lincoln. His line is extinct.

God maintained Jesus’ lineage for more than 2,000 years—preserving it and providing all the males necessary to keep it alive. He did so despite Satan’s attempts to wipe it out because Satan knew what God had promised. Satan believed that if he could destroy all the males, he could terminate the line and prevent God from fulfilling His promise to bring the Messiah.

Fortunately for us, not even Satan can thwart the Almighty. God overrules in the affairs of men, and history unfolds exactly as He has planned from the very beginning.

**More Miracles**

Christ’s remarkable lineage is not the only supernatural event connected with His incarnation. In Matthew 1:21, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to impart significant information about the unborn child. Mary and Joseph were not yet married, but they had made a commitment to each other that was almost as binding as a legal marriage in that culture.

To reassure Joseph that Mary had not been unfaithful to him, the angel delivered a message containing three amazing statements:

1. **Jesus’ Conception.** “For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (v. 20). Mary was not impregnated by natural means. Her child was the result of a supernatural act of God the Holy Spirit. That’s why we call it the virgin birth. Mary was a virgin in every normal sense of the word: She had not had relations with a man. But the Holy Spirit miraculously came upon her, and she conceived a child.

2. **His Gender.** “She will bring forth a Son” (Mt. 1:21). Today a baby’s gender is no longer a much-anticipated revelation. We have “gender reveal parties,” when moms and dads announce to the world what modern technology has revealed to them about their unborn children. In those days, however, nobody knew a baby’s gender until the child arrived. Only God knew this baby’s gender because He had planned for the incarnation of His Son from eternity past. And He revealed that information prior to the child’s birth.

3. **His Mission.** “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (v. 21). Many
people have goals they never obtain due to circumstances that come along in life. Yet before Mary’s baby was born, His parents knew exactly what Jesus was going to do: He would be the Savior, which means “Deliverer.”

But this Savior did not come to deliver His people from their enemies. He would not defeat the Roman armies or deliver the Jewish people from persecution or hardship. Rather, the angel specifically said Jesus would deliver His people from their sins. He would perform a spiritual work, freeing individuals from the penalty of their sins, enabling them to have peace with God and everlasting life.

His Nature. Ironically, the most supernatural element of Christ’s birth is the one most missed by an unbelieving world. The apostle John said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:1, 14).

As far back as we can imagine, when nothing existed but God, the Word existed. Who was the Word? “The Word was with God, and the Word was God.” With one-syllable words that any grade-school student can understand, God has revealed astonishing biblical and theological concepts concerning the Lord Jesus Christ:

→ The Word has a separate identity from God. The Word was with God. So they are separate.
→ The Word and God are the same. “The Word was God.” So they are identical.
→ The Word is the Creator. “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (vv. 2–3).
→ The Word is life. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (v. 4). He is the source of every living thing.

It seems obvious the Word is God.

Verse 14 explains more: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” This verse plainly tells us that, at the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, God became a man. That event is revolutionary. It is astounding. It is supernatural. It is what we call the Incarnation. God, who is a spirit no one can see, took on Himself a human nature—including a human body—and came to Earth and lived among us.

The phrase dwelt among us literally means “pitched His tent among us.” This is obviously John’s reference to the Jewish Tabernacle in the wilderness, the portable tent where God chose to reveal Himself to the people of Israel. Jesus did the same thing through His birth. He “pitched His tent” among us so He could reveal to us truth about God that we would not otherwise know.

The message of Christmas is Immanuel: “God with us.” God came to us because we could never find our way to Him. And He did so by sending His Son to Earth.

Christmas is all about God’s grace. It’s about what God has done for us that we could never have done for ourselves.

Christmas is also about God’s humility. We can’t begin to fathom what took place when the all-glorious, all-powerful, perfect, majestic, sovereign, eternal God of the ages allowed Himself to take on the weaknesses, limitations, and frailties of our humanity.

Jesus was not a phantom. He was not an angel. He was not a mystical, ghostlike figure. While on Earth, He was not God sometimes and man at other times. He was not part God and part man. He was fully and completely God at all times while on Earth, yet fully and completely a genuine human being. That’s the mystery of the Incarnation.

Christmas revolves around the supernatural. And if we reduce this celebration to an ordinary holiday that involves nothing more than giving each other gifts, we miss the greatest gift ever given: the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

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More than 19 centuries have passed since the memorable night when an angel of the Lord brought the heavenly message to the shepherds tending their sheep upon the hills of Judea. The message filled their hearts with the supreme joy of their lives: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

Savior, Salvation, Jesus—wonderful words so closely knit together that they can be used interchangeably without violating their meaning or ultimate sense.

HOW SWEET THE NAME

“Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21, KJV). It is significant that the name Jesus, which in Hebrew is Yeshua, and the word salvation, which is Yeshua, are identical. The word salvation had a sweet sound in the believer’s ear of the old dispensation. It meant to him the fulfillment of those things most earnestly hoped for—redemption from sin and the power of sin, from guilt and the sense of guilt. Atonement with God—forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and the return of the Shekinah Glory to dwell visibly with His people.

It meant the coming of the Savior, the Anointed of God, His wonderful Sinbearer, who was to shed His own blood for the redemption of His people. This was the faith and expectation of Moses when he sacrificed...
the Passover Lamb. As we read in Hebrews 11:28 (KJV), "Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood." This was the earnest expectation of the fathers before him and the great prophets who followed after him.

Salvation also had a meaning for God's people here on Earth. It meant deliverance from oppression and the power of the ungodly. It meant the return of God's favor to a people repentant, cleansed, and forgiven. These and similar thoughts must have filled the hearts and minds of the Judean shepherds when they heard the angelic message. For them it was the moment supreme. It was the day that crowned the yearning and prayers of generations.

It was with a view to this glorious day that David prophesied, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24, KJV). The Messianic hope lightened the burdens of every Israelite and gave sense to his sufferings. It made the reproaches and scorn of the ungodly bearable and the riches of Earth as trash compared to the glory and riches of Christ. About Moses we read he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:26, KJV). The coming of the Messiah was the climax of all things hoped and prayed for. It was the crowning day of glory.

It is in this light we understand the exultation that filled the breast of the aged saint of God, Simeon, as he held in his arms the Child Jesus, whose very name spelled salvation. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Lk. 2:29–30, KJV).

Nineteen centuries have passed. Oceans of tears and blood have stained the face of the earth. Yet to them who have admitted Jesus into their hearts and have longed for His coming again, has come peace—wonderful peace—amid sadness, strife, persecution, and suffering—sometimes beyond endurance. And when the hour of their parting from this world came, they went away, not defeated, but with peace in their hearts and the full knowledge of Him who made them more than conquerors. They, too, "have seen [His] salvation"; and they departed in peace to be with their Lord.

Nineteen centuries have passed, but we still find the name of Jesus full of solace and sweetness unspeakable. We sing, "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear! It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fear."

Nineteen centuries of sin and tragic failure have come and gone. History has been made, a history that records the futile attempts of men to save themselves without God and without His Anointed. It is a record of disaster and defeat, a record of defiance of God, of shame and sin. Today the Christian lives in a world engulfed by hate and human wretchedness.

The believer of our day finds himself very close to the believer of old in his waiting for the consolation of Israel and the coming again of the Christ to reign in glory and majesty, when He will put an end to all man's tragic failures.

**AN INSTRUMENT IN GOD'S HANDS**

The year 5707, according to the Jewish reckoning, has ended. It was a year of undiminished suffering, especially for the Jewish survivors in Europe. [Editor: The current Hebrew year is 5778.] Two and a half years after the end of the war [World War II], the Jews are still the inmates of concentration camps in Germany and in Austria and on the island of Cyprus and elsewhere, just as in the evil days of Hitler.

It was a year pregnant with bitter strife and struggle about Palestine. The year 1947 has amply illustrated the truth of God's Word that the wrath of man worketh no righteousness.

The report of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommending the partition of Palestine into two separate states has been made public and has gained the support and approval of the leading powers of the UN. It seems the partition into two states is about to be accomplished for woe or for weal. Whether the UN realizes it or not, it is an instrument in God's hand to hasten the fulfillment of His eternal purposes concerning the restoration and salvation of Israel.

We are witnessing the approach of an all-time climax of history—the Second Coming of the Lord. What shall we as Christians think about it? Shall we rejoice or sorrow? Our feelings are mixed. We do rejoice with our brethren, especially the homeless and tempest tossed, that at last their hopes and prayers and ancient dreams are coming true; that home will come to the wanderer, and that the weary-footed people shall find a place of rest with no warships or armies to sweep them to concentration camps. But oh, how our hearts ache as we think of the sorrows and trials and the Great Tribulation that is yet to come upon the children of Jacob.

God is speeding up His program for Israel's redemption. With the return of the Jewish people to their land, even in unbelief, God is accomplishing His purpose. And as He is bringing to pass the former things, full of sorrow and agony, He will also bring to pass the latter things, of restoration, regeneration, and salvation.

The Day of the Lord is coming when He shall be King over all the earth: "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in
that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one” (Zech. 14:9, KJV). Then the prayers of countless generations, “Thy Kingdom come,” shall have been fulfilled.

In the meantime, the lovers of God’s people Israel shall pray in the words of the ancient hymn of the church:

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

FINALLY BRETHREN
This year has been for The Friends of Israel a year rich in blessing and progress. More relief has been sent to the needy than ever before; and thousands have been fed and clothed, and their needs both spiritual and physical supplied.

During my recent visit to Europe, so many came to see me and said, “God sent you to us when we needed you most.” They pointed to the clothing they were wearing and asked if I recognized it. Of course, I did not. We have sent thousands of garments for men, women, and children. It would be impossible to know each piece of clothing. Hundreds said if it had not been for the food we sent them when hunger stared them in the face, they surely would have perished. How humbled and grateful I felt that our Heavenly Father has so graciously made it possible to help these His children. It is from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

A great and sacred cause has been entrusted unto us. Like John Wesley, we might say, “The world is our parish.” For indeed our borders have been increased, and wherever the need is greatest, there we seek to go. And still pleas for help are coming in, each more heartrending than the former. “Come over and help us” is their cry, and we cannot turn a deaf ear to them.

The coming year, 1948, promises to be a year of great harvest. Souls are hungry and lost in this world without hope and without God. Only in Christ is salvation and peace.

The Lord has blessed us and caused us to become one of the leading gospel and relief organizations in the world, laboring among the Children of Israel. We enter into 1948 with the confidence the Lord, who was with us in the days of small beginnings and blessed us above all our hopes, will go before us in the days to come. ✡

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UNEARTHING TRUTH WITH RANDALL PRICE

NOAH’S ARK—FACT OR FICTION?

About 20 years ago, the news media reported on the search for the remains of Noah’s ark. In an interview on the subject, a professor of Old Testament at a liberal Christian university quipped that people will find Noah’s ark about the same time they find “Jack’s beanstalk.” The professor obviously believed the biblical flood was a fairytale.

Evangelical scholars disagree on whether the global flood actually happened. Some believe geology disproves the biblical account. Others believe the discovery of comparative Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) accounts discredits the biblical story and reveals the Bible either borrowed a local myth or created its own version of the event.

However, scores of professional geologists hold to a biblical, universal flood; and many scientific creationist organizations defend this position online and in books and articles. Furthermore, an honest examination of ANE literature actually attests to the historicity of the Genesis record.

First-century, Jewish historian Flavius Josephus observed, “This flood and the ark are mentioned by all who have written histories of the barbarians. Among these is Berosus the Chaldean . . . Hieronymus the Egyptian, author of the ancient history of Phoenicia, by Mnaseas and by many others . . . this might well be the same man of whom Moses the Jewish legislator, wrote.”

Josephus’ statement provides evidence from antiquity that the flood narrative was not only known to the ancients, but was also widely circulated. A modern survey of cultures and beliefs reveals a flood account in as many as 213 societies.

Limiting our focus to the Ancient Near East, we find numerous flood narratives in ancient texts, such as the Eridu Genesis (2150 BC), the Sumerian King List (2119 BC), the Instructions of Shuruppak (2100 BC), the Simmonds Cuneiform Tablet (1900–1700 BC), The Epic of Atra-Hasis (1635 BC), and The Epic of Gilgamesh (1150 BC).

These accounts contain details like those found in Genesis: a divine threat to destroy humanity, one man’s choice to preserve the animals, the building of an ark, animals coming two-by-two, the ark’s landing on a mountain, the sending out of birds to determine if the waters had receded, and worship through sacrifice after departing the ark.

Though ANE accounts share some similarities with the Genesis record, they also differ markedly in other areas, such as the size of the ark and duration of the flood. The ANE stories even differ from one another, indicating the flood tradition was transmitted in the same way as other ancient stories.

Most of the ANE flood accounts predate the biblical account, leading some critics to suggest the Bible copied pagan myths and incorporated them into Scripture. But the biblical narrative clearly reads as good history and is absent of pagan concepts. Myths become more mythical over time, not more historical. Therefore, the biblical account could not have arisen from these myths.

Rather, the pagan stories and the biblical account come from a common history that was later adapted, abridged, and modified according to the distinct culture and religion.

The history of the flood tradition proves yet again how archaeology attests to the historicity of Genesis, and—for that matter—the New Testament, since Jesus used the judgment of the flood as evidence for the future judgment at His Second Coming (Mt. 24:37; Lk. 17:26).

ENDNOTE

1 Flavius Josephus Antiquities of the Jews 1.3.6.

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LIVING IN MORAL PURITY

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1–8

Some people find it difficult to live for Christ. But God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us, and we need to learn how to yield our lives to His control.

In the final two chapters of 1 Thessalonians, the apostle Paul instructed the church in four major areas that require dependence on the Holy Spirit: (1) live in moral purity, (2) maintain a testimony of harmony and honesty before believers and unbelievers alike, (3) live in anticipation of the Lord’s coming for His church, and (4) live in light of the Day of the Lord.

COUNSEL ON PURITY

The phrase *we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus* introduces the seriousness of what Paul was about to say: “Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God” (4:1).

The word *finally* is not meant to conclude the epistle but, rather, to introduce Paul’s teaching of the last two chapters dealing with holy living. By using the words *urge* and *exhort*, Paul implored believers to continue living holy lives in view of their union with Christ.

Earlier, he taught these Christians how they “ought to [must] walk” and exhorted them to “abound more and more” in holy living and never be satisfied with the level they had already achieved because only a pure life will “please God.” Holiness was Paul’s ongoing prayer for the Thessalonian church (3:13).

Paul reminded the Thessalonians of his past instruction to them: “For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus” (4:2). The source and authority of his instruction came from Jesus Christ, who commissioned him as a missionary.

COMMAND ON PURITY

God’s will is that we all practice holy living: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality” (v. 3; cf. Lev. 11:44–45; 1 Pet. 1:15–16).

Holy living begins with our “sanctification.” But what does it mean to be sanctified? The word *sanctification* means to be set apart, both spiritually and physically, for Christ. The process involves the Holy Spirit, who cleanses us by washing us with the “water” of God’s Word (Eph. 5:26).

Scripture teaches that we are sanctified in three stages:

1. **Positionally.** We were eternally set apart for God when we were redeemed by receiving Jesus Christ as our personal Savior (Heb. 10:10, 14; 13:12).

2. **Progressively.** We are being sanctified daily through an ongoing process as we obey the teachings of God’s Word.

3. **Perfectly.** We will be perfected when we receive ultimate, or complete, sanctification upon receiving our resurrected bodies when the Lord comes for His church (Eph. 5:27).

Then every believer will be perfectly sanctified.

Paul gave three illustrations of how progressive sanctification works. Each begins with the word that:

1) “That you should abstain from sexual immorality [Greek, *porneias*]” (1 Th. 4:3). The Greek word means “fornication,” which encompasses all forms of sexual practices that lie outside God’s revealed will: adultery, premarital and extramarital relations, homosexuality, and various perversions. This was one of the three admonitions the Holy Spirit-led first church council decreed to the churches (Acts 15:29).

2) “That each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Th. 4:4–5). Paul was not implying there was immorality within the Thessalonians’ church. Rather, he was speaking of sexual temptations they would face as Christians because many had participated in a morally degrading pagan religion before they gave their lives to Christ. Paul reminded them to live pure lives that would glorify Christ. Christianity is incompatible with sexual immorality (cf. 1 Cor. 6:15–20).

Paul further stated, “not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Th. 4:5). The word *passion* conveys a strong desire, craving, or longing (that could be good or bad). In this context, it refers to an inordinate craving for something sinful. Lust also can refer to something good or bad. Here it refers to an inordinate desire that dominates or controls us and craves fulfillment, moving us to sin. People who give in to such desire become slaves to their uncontrollable passions and do not glorify Christ.

The word *Gentile* usually means anyone who is not Jewish. But in this context it signifies a non-Christian. It should be noted that Paul divided the world into Jews and Gentiles. Although there are exceptions, the Gentiles outside of Christ are characterized as ignorant of the true and living God. Thus they “do not know God” (v. 5).

In Romans 1:18–32, Paul explained how people have...
suppressed the knowledge of God from the inception of creation. Turning their backs on the natural revelation that God provided, they became depraved and began worshiping images of man, birds, four-footed animals, and creeping things. Therefore, God gave them over to their lustful passions and perverted sexual practices.

These Thessalonians once fell into this category, but they turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God. Now they were being delivered by Christ from ungodliness, and their regression to idolatry would be despicable and disgrace the name of Christ.

3) “That no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified” (1 Th. 4:6). Here the discussion shifts to how our immorality would affect our Christian brethren.

The phrase *take advantage of* means to wrong, “defraud,” or cheat someone by sinning against him. The context refers specifically to wronging another Christian, but it also applies to wronging a non-Christian.

Scholars disagree on the meaning of the words *in this matter*. Some believe *matter* refers to impurity and dishonesty in business too. Others believe only sexual impurity is referenced. The context would indicate sexual impurity alone because verses 3–8 constitute a single paragraph dealing with abstaining from sexual immorality. Thus the sins of fornication and adultery violate the rights of the other party involved. In fact, any unbiblical sexual relationship, such as homosexuality (Rom. 1:26–27), which was rampant in Paul’s day, should be viewed as sexual impurity.

**COMMITMENT TO PURITY**

Paul provided three reasons why we are not to commit sexual sins against other Christians.

First, “because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified” (v. 6). The *Lord* refers to Jesus Christ, who God has said will judge the world (Jn. 5:22). The word *avenger* also refers to Christ, who will judge all sexually impure people.

We need to understand that God is not vindictive or spiteful, getting even with people for what they’ve done. He acts out of His moral holiness to acquire justice for the person offended and to maintain society’s moral order. Scripture emphasizes that a just and righteous God will judge all who commit such sins.

Paul reminded the Thessalonian church that this teaching was not new. Believers were “forewarned” when Paul and his missionary team were establishing the church. He had “testified,” or affirmed, the teaching of God’s judgment while preaching the gospel.

Second, “For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (1 Th. 4:7). Paul reminded the Thessalonians of their calling. The word *call* refers to the time when Paul and his team were in Thessalonica and God divinely called the Thessalonians to receive salvation, thus making them new creations in union with Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). At that time, God also called them to put away their pagan “uncleanness” and live righteously.

Third, “Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God” (1 Th. 4:8). The word *therefore* is better translated “truly,” “consequently,” or “for this reason.” Thus someone “who rejects” this message on sexual purity openly rejects God, not man. Such disobedience constitutes an outright act of rebellion against God Himself.

**WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT GOD IS NOT VINDICTIVE OR SPITEFUL, GETTING EVEN WITH PEOPLE FOR WHAT THEY’VE DONE. HE ACTS OUT OF HIS MORAL HOLINESS TO ACQUIRE JUSTICE FOR THE PERSON OFFENDED AND TO MAINTAIN SOCIETY’S MORAL ORDER.**

God, who demands moral purity of each believer, is the One “who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (v. 8). God gave us the Holy Spirit at the time of our conversion to empower us to shun moral impurity and live holy lives that please Him. Since God’s Spirit lives in us, we have a responsibility to yield our lives to the Holy Spirit’s control. To continue in sexual impurity is a sin against God, the Holy Spirit, our Christian brethren, and ourselves. We will one day give an account before God for our attitudes and actions.

This is a powerful message from God through the apostle Paul and a most necessary one today.

**by David M. Levy,**

*director of Education and Ministry Relations and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel*
CHRISTMAS BEDLAM

For many of us, Christmas is far from the “silent night” and “peace on earth” we sing about. Copious community events, school concerts, and church programs fill the season. Fare at social and family gatherings rivals that of medieval banquets and expands our waistlines. Shopping and gift-giving expectations pressure us to spend more than we can afford. Heavy traffic crawls along the highways, and tempers flare as the holiday hustle and bustle crescendo into a frenzied pitch. Sometimes it feels like pure bedlam!

The word bedlam originated from the nickname for St. Mary’s of Bethlehem, a London priory founded in the mid-1200s to care for the poor and disabled. It eventually became England’s first mental institution. Over the years, colloquial language shortened the name to Bethlem, which mutated into Bedlam.

Bedlam’s sordid history involves brutal patient treatment involving cells, chains, shackles, beatings, and dietary rationing. It became a place of uncontrolled noise, chaos, and confusion—utter “bedlam.” By the mid-1600s, visitors were paying to observe the behavior of naked, chained patients who were often screaming, crying, cursing, ranting, or acting like animals. Some claim it was like a human zoo. Broken souls became London’s local entertainment.

The words quiet and peaceful do not come to mind when describing London’s Bedlam. Nor do they come to mind when pondering the village of Bethlehem on that first Christmas day. Chaos, confusion, and noise probably filled the air as King David’s travel-weary descendants poured into the city for the mandatory census. They arrived looking for places to stay, food to eat, and relatives to provide it all.

The long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem no doubt was hard for Joseph and even more difficult for Mary, who was rapidly approaching her time to give birth. Upon their arrival, they had nowhere to stay in the crowded town and were brought to a stable filled with animals covered with the dust of journeys from afar. Potent smells filled the air as Joseph cleared a resting place in the straw.

Then the fullness of time came, and Mary gave birth, separated from all familiar comforts. She endured the sting of the sin curse—pain during childbirth—and brought forth her firstborn son.

Joy and wonder quickly overcame exhaustion and fear. The stable’s unpretentious accommodations provided little more than swaddling cloths, a chiseled-stone feeding trough, straw (for bedding), and perhaps a few blankets.

In the surrounding fields, without warning, the blackened night sky burst into brilliance with the glory of the Lord as angels unashamedly proclaimed the Good News. The spectacle terrified the shepherds. Their obvious fear required angelic reassurance: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:10–11).

Imagine the shepherds’ excitement. Good news? A Savior? Joy? Let’s leave the sheep and hurry to find the babe! they thought, “and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us” (Lk. 2:15). They searched with haste until they found Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus, exactly as the angel had told them.

There was bedlam in Bethlehem that night. Mary and Joseph marveled, the shepherds quaked, the town awakened, and heaven and Earth changed for all eternity.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, bedlam also ruled in people’s hearts. They were lost and confused without
a Messiah. The same may be said today. Chaos, confusion, and the disorder of bedlam often reign in the midst of the Christmas holiday. People who don’t know the Savior grasp for something or someone to bring hope and peace to chaotic lives and broken hearts.

**Jesus came to bedlam.** Chaos and confusion reigned in the world when Jesus arrived. The Jewish priest Zacharias declared that Jesus came “to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (1:79). Jesus said He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (19:10).

**Jesus brought hope to bedlam.** Jesus is the ultimate expression of God’s tender mercy to those without hope. He is the “Dayspring from on high” who came to bring us out of hopelessness and darkness (1:78).

**Jesus brought comfort and joy to bedlam.** He is the Consolation of Israel, the salvation from the Lord, and the answer for all who look for redemption (2:25–38).

**MY ‘WOW’ MOMENT**
Throughout my years as a pastor, Christmas was often the most challenging time of the year. Juggling the feverish schedule of leading a church, ministering to the community, and raising a family exhausted me. But I always looked forward to our annual Christmas Eve candlelight service.

By the time the service began, the busyness of the Christmas season had ended. The stores were closed, the programs were behind us, and the food baskets and gifts were delivered to the needy. The service was simple and quiet. We sang traditional carols, followed by a Bible message.

I proclaimed the Good News from the pulpit with great joy and encouraged the congregants to consider their personal relationships with God. Then, as the darkened church began to glow with the lighting of individual candles, we filled the room with the melodious sounds of “Silent Night.”

For me, that’s when Christmas began. I could finally fix my heart and mind on Jesus, rather than on the myriad of ministry details. Like the shepherds, I experienced my “wow” moment then. The Savior’s presence soothed my frantic pace.

Seeing Christ changed the shepherds’ lives. Although we can’t travel back in time to join them at the manger, what they learned that first Christmas night can guide us from bedlam to peace and joy in Christ.

The Lord revealed to the shepherds that the Savior, Christ the Lord, was born (v. 11). They dropped everything and pursued this truth. Ask yourself, “What is the most important thing to me about Christmas?” If it is Christ, make enjoying Him your priority. Yes, enjoy the celebrations, but don’t squeeze Christ out. Make Him the center of them. Pursue Him. Determine to spend time with Him. Skip the less important things so you can celebrate the true meaning of Christmas—the Incarnation of Immanuel, “God with us.”

The shepherds told people about Christ. Scripture suggests they talked about Him to everyone, everywhere they went. Talk about Jesus with your family—around the table, at a party, at the store, etc. Make time to read the Scriptures about Him: His birth, death, burial, and resurrection. Remember who He is, what He has done, and what He is going to do for you.

When was the last time the truth that God loved you so much He gave His only begotten Son for you moved you? Christmas is about God’s indescribable gift of grace. It is about hope in the midst of despair. It is about a Savior who was born to die for you. Let that truth leave you in wonder this Christmas season, as it did the shepherds.

After all the shepherds had seen and heard, they stopped fearing and began praising and glorifying God (v. 20). If we allow the truth of Christmas to impact our hearts and lives, it will move us from fear to faith, as well, changing the way we face the future. When God becomes the main character in our lives, our priorities, conversations, and outlooks will change.

Let’s refocus this Christmas on the joy and peace found only in the Good News of the Messiah and Savior, Jesus Christ. The choice is ours: bedlam or blessing.

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**Skip the less important things so you can celebrate the true meaning of Christmas—the Incarnation of Immanuel, “God with us.”**
ISRAEL HELPS SYRIAN WAR VICTIMS

Israel has provided free medical care and hundreds of tons of humanitarian aid to more than 200,000 war-afflicted Syrians over the past year. The project, called “Operation Good Neighbor,” launched in June 2016 as part of Israel’s continuing effort to help the victims of Syria’s civil war.

To date, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has provided more than 390 tons of food and flour; 120,000 gallons of gas; 100 tons of clothes; 12 tons of shoes; 12,000 packages of baby formula; 1,800 packages of diapers; and 1,900 feet of water pipes to neighboring Syrian villages, The Jerusalem Post reported. “Israel is saving lives on a daily basis, and we are working hard to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground. We will continue to do so and grow the project as needed,” IDF Brig. Gen. Yaniv Ashur said.

Israel also has provided free medical treatment to more than 3,000 wounded Syrians. According to Ashur, more than 600 Syrian children and their parents go to Israel every month to receive free, anonymous medical attention.

Though Syria and Israel officially remain at war, Syrians near Israel’s border have begun to view Israel as a friend, contrary to what the mainstream Arab narrative has taught them. “The IDF brought them to our hospital, and we—the Israeli doctors—helped them [and] cured them. They looked at us as the enemy, but after being taken care of in Israel, they changed their views,” Ziv Medical Center’s Dr. Alejandro Roisentul said.

Israel plans to open soon a new, IDF-built field hospital in Syria so victims can receive immediate medical attention without crossing the border. The hospital will treat 60 patients a day and maintain the capacity to grow to treat more than 500 a day.

From news reports

U.S. FUNDS EXTREMIST PALESTINIAN SUMMER CAMP

An extremist Palestinian summer camp in Ramallah has been receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars annually from the United States, according to a recent report by JNS.org. The camp, called “Go Palestine,” is a three-week summer program run by the Ramallah Friends School and reaches 40 to 50 teenagers annually from countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Though the school’s stated intent is to introduce “Diaspora Palestinian youth and friends” to Arab-Palestinian culture, its own description of activities reveals its anti-Israel agenda.

“The camp’s own descriptions . . . report that the teens are shown films such as Occupation 101 and Jerusalem: The East Side Story, which depict Israel as a racist, savage oppressor. A panel on ‘Youth Activism and Engagement in Palestine’ featured representatives of the ‘Love Under Apartheid Campaign’ and the BDS movement,” reported JNS.org.

Last year, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) gave $800,000 to the school. U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY), after reviewing JNS.org’s report, called upon USAID to begin an investigation immediately. “If true, this school should be cut off because entities that receive USAID should be teaching about democracy and coexistence—not intolerance or extremism,” Schumer said.

Other anti-Israel activities listed on the camp’s website include visiting monuments of Palestinian “martyrs” (terrorists who died while attacking Israelis), meeting Palestinian ex-prisoners (convicted terrorists), and listening to lectures from the “renowned journalist, author, and teacher” Nasser Ibrahim (an affiliate of the terrorist group the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine).

The website also lists the Israeli city of Haifa as “Haifa, Palestine,” which further betrays the camp’s ideology of rejecting Israel’s right to exist.

From news reports
ROYAL DUTCH SHELL MAY BUY GAS FROM ISRAEL

Royal Dutch Shell is in talks to buy natural gas from Israel’s Leviathan field, combine it with output from Cyprus’s Aphrodite field, in which it owns a 35 percent stake, and pump it to a liquefied natural gas plant in Egypt, a move that could help turn the Mediterranean region into a major gas-producing hub.

Bloomberg Markets reported that Leviathan’s partners, led by Noble Energy Inc. and Delek Drilling LP, “are looking at various shipment options as they face an estimated development cost of $3.75 billion.”

According to JNS.org, “Gas deliveries to Egypt would be channeled through a Shell plant pipeline located on the country’s Mediterranean coast. Israel, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and the European Union have agreed to collaboratively develop the world’s longest gas pipeline, running undersea between Israel and Italy.”

From news reports

ISRAEL HELPS HOUSTON’S STORM VICTIMS

Israeli volunteers poured into Houston, Texas, following Hurricane Harvey to help the tens of thousands of Texans left homeless in late August.

Two Israeli organizations—IsraAid and the Israel Rescue Coalition (IRC)—sent groups of volunteers to assist victims in immediate disaster relief and trauma counseling. “The community in Houston and the people of Texas feel a strong connection to the State of Israel. . . . It is therefore our responsibility to help them in their time of need,” IRC’s mission leader and Houston-native Miriam Ballin said.

The Israeli government also has donated $1 million in aid to the Houston Jewish community to restore infrastructure, such as schools and synagogues.

From news reports

AMERICAN, CANADIAN TEXTBOOKS PROMOTE ANTI-ISRAEL BIAS

Anti-Israel textbooks are stoking sentiments against Israel on North American college campuses.

“The problem starts in high school,” Dr. Sandra Alfonsi, director of Hadassah’s Curriculum Watch, told JNS.org. “The lack of sympathy for Israel on college campuses today is at least partly the result of several generations of teenagers being educated with textbooks that are slanted against Israel.”

One American high-school textbook, The Arab World Studies Notebook, erroneously “[depicts] Israel as the aggressor in every Arab-Israeli war and [praises] Muslim conquerors throughout the ages for their ‘gentle treatment of civilian populations,’” JNS.org reported. It even falsely accuses Israel of torturing and murdering hundreds of Arab-Palestinian women.

A Canadian middle-school history book, Canada and the Global Community, lists Israeli children as “spies and soldiers” and accuses Israel of “kidnapping” child soldiers, Breitbart reported. B’nai Brith Canada’s CEO Michael Mostyn called on Ontario’s education ministry to restore truth to the classroom. “The Ministry has an obligation to not only correct these errors, but to teach the reality of the situation,” Mostyn said.

From news reports

ARAB CARTOONS MOCK ISRAEL

Arab media around the world have released a string of cartoons mocking Israel’s removal of the metal detectors placed at the entrance to the Temple Mount in July after Arab terrorists smuggled guns onto the site and murdered two Israeli guards.

Palestinians celebrated what they consider their victory over Israel. Israel plans to install what it calls “advanced technologies” with cameras that can detect hidden objects. But the Muslim Waqf, which administers the site, says it will not even allow the cameras.

From news reports

IDF DISCOVERS MORE TERRORIST TUNNELS

The Israel Defense Forces have discovered via aerial photographs more Hamas terrorist tunnels with entry shafts underneath houses and public buildings. Hamas frequently hides its infrastructure in civilian areas then blames Israel for civilian casualties during combat.

The tunnels Hamas uses to hide and smuggle weapons into Israel are legitimate military targets under international law. “Anyone staying in these houses endangers himself and his family. Buildings used as cover for underground construction will become legitimate military targets,” IDF Maj. Gen. Eyal Zamir said.

Arutz-7

ISRAEL DEVELOPS NEW PARKINSON’S TREATMENT

NeuroDerm, a Rehovot-based pharmaceutical company, has developed a new, less invasive treatment for patients with advanced Parkinson’s disease. “We have been able to produce a liquid formulation for the first time that can be administered inside the body directly, not through the stomach, but under the skin,” NeuroDerm’s Chief Medical Officer Dr. Sheila Oren said.

Although the drug is still in clinical trials, Oren said the company plans to submit commercialization paperwork to American and European regulatory agencies by the end of 2018 and have the product on the market by the end of 2019.

jpost.com

ONTARIO BANS ISRAELI WINE

The Canadian province of Ontario’s regulatory agency for liquor has demanded all stores stop selling Israeli wines because of a dispute over the proper labeling of goods from the disputed territories. Israel, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario wrote, is not “an acceptable country of origin declaration for wine products that have been made from grapes . . . in the West Bank occupied territory.”

Last year, Berlin’s high-end department store KaDeWe also removed Israeli wines from its shelves over a similar labeling dispute. Due to backlash, KaDeWe apologized and restocked its shelves.

jpost.com
We often say in Israel, “If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain.” Every Friday night, Orthodox women go door to door, trying to convince people to observe the Sabbath.

Recently, several Orthodox women came to my home. “If you keep the Sabbath, all of your sins will be forgiven,” one told me. “You must also read from a holy siddur [Jewish prayer book] three times a day.”

“If this book is so holy,” I asked, “of what value is the Bible? After all, many different people wrote this prayer book, but the Holy Spirit of God wrote the Bible. Do you think this prayer book is more important than the Psalms, the book of prayer in the Bible?”

They looked at one another. Then one said, “Of course, Psalms is very important.”

“I will read you something,” I said. “Then give me your opinion.” I read to them Psalm 118:8, where it is written, “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.”

They became angry that they had stopped by my house. “Have you studied the Bible?” one asked.

“I read the Bible,” I said. “And I believe what it says. Do you know what the writers of the siddur believe concerning the value of women? Have you prayed the morning prayer?”

“How can you ask us that?” one replied. “We are religious women.”

I opened their prayer book and read for them the prayer from the morning service: “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a woman.”

“Is a woman a lesser human being? Did not God create both men and women?” I asked.

“We have talked with you long enough,” one answered. “We will ask our rabbis that question and return to answer you.”

by Zvi Kalisher
Where have you studied all of this?"

"I have placed my faith in the Lord," I replied. "I read the Holy Bible—not the many fictitious stories you read. I do not boycott Scripture." They told me they were unaware they had boycotted any portions of Scripture. So I read to them Isaiah 53:

> We hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (vv. 3, 5–6).

"About whom was this passage written?" I asked.

"We do not know. We have never read this," one replied.

I then read other Scriptures: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (7:14).

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2).

"Did you just read to us about This Man?" one asked. The Orthodox always refer to Jesus as "This Man."

"How did you know it was written about Yeshua?" I asked.

Then they asked if I was a Christian. I told them the Bible is for everyone, but the Lord will give eternal life only to those who believe in Him.

"We are saved because we belong to the people of Israel," one retorted.

So I read to them from King Solomon’s prayer to show them they were wrong: "IfYour people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and return and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before the Lord, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel" (2 Chr. 6:24–25).

"We can be saved only when we turn to Him," I said. We must read the Bible, written by the Spirit of God, and not depend on a prayer book written by men.

—The Friends of Israel Archives, September 2005

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**Zvi Kalisher** (1928–2014) was a Holocaust survivor who was known for his unswerving faithfulness to the Lord and his bold witness in Jerusalem. He was with The Friends of Israel for more than 55 years.
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